

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Is Anthrax contagious?

A: Anthrax is not spread from person to person like the cold or flu. Anthrax is caused by the bacterium, *Bacillus anthracis*. *Bacillus anthracis* is found naturally in soil and is a common infection in domestic and wild animals. It is rare that people become sick with anthrax, but it can happen when people breathe in spores, eat food or drink water contaminated with spores, or get spores in a cut or scrape in the skin. Even if you get sick with anthrax, you are not contagious to other people. More information can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website <http://www.cdc.gov/anthrax/index.html>.

Q: What is the select agent program and how many labs in the U.S. are authorized to handle anthrax?

A: In the U.S., there are about 300 labs that work with select agents such as the agent that causes anthrax. The Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (<http://www.selectagents.gov/>) regulate labs that work with select agents and know the actual number of labs that work with these agents.

Q: It has to be a concern to you that the numbers keep going up. How concerned are you that nobody can give you a fix on the scope of this problem?

A: We've ordered a test on every single inactivated anthrax batch that we have in all four of our laboratories. This means we have to test potentially hundreds of different batches, and we will not have a complete picture of the scope of the problem until all of this testing has been completed. As we continue to test more batches, we can reasonably expect that the numbers may go up.

Q: Why did it take the Pentagon more than a week to come out publicly and talk about this matter for the first time, given the level of public concern? Why so many days before you talked about it?

A: Once we received word from the CDC that a lab had reported growth of live anthrax in a sample of anthrax from the DoD that was believed to be inactivated (on the evening of May 22), we immediately notified any labs that may have received this sample out of concern for the health and safety of the individuals who may have been inadvertently exposed. Furthermore, CDC had to notify those labs and public health officials in those states, and recommend appropriate action, including recalling all samples any lab had received from these batches. This sample tracing, testing, and notification took time to complete, after which we notified the public in our press statement on May 29, 2015.

Q: Why does it take so long to figure out where a supposedly tightly controlled substance like anthrax was actually shipped?

A: We still have to complete testing to find out if batches of inactivated anthrax in our inventory contain any live anthrax, which takes between 10-16 days from the date the test is begun.

Q: Was live anthrax mistakenly sent to the Pentagon?

A: The Pentagon Force Protection Agency (PFPA) manages a laboratory, which conducts biological surveillance of the Pentagon environment. The laboratory is not located in the Pentagon. As part of this investigation, PFPA samples were sent to the CDC for additional testing. No live anthrax was found in these samples. Pentagon tenants were never at risk from exposure to anthrax.

Q: Is this normal procedure for the U.S. to ship deadly agents around the world? What's the objective?

A: The Department of Defense's Chemical and Biological Defense Program develops medical and physical countermeasures to protect the warfighter and the nation from chemical and biological threats as part of an integrated, layered defense. Specifically, we develop vaccines, drug, and diagnostics for medical use and personnel protective equipment, such as masks, suits, and gloves, decontamination equipment and detector equipment. In order to achieve our goals, DoD and other government agencies regularly ship both live and dead biological materials for countermeasure development by industry, academia, and other federal laboratories.

Q. How long will this investigation take and what agencies will be involved?

A. We cannot speculate on how long the investigation will take but we are working in close coordination with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and our international partners.

Q. What are the steps taken to ensure that this doesn't happen again?

A. The investigation will reveal the issues involved in this situation. We are working closely to determine what occurred to ensure it does not happen again.

Q: Do any overseas DoD labs work with live anthrax?

A: DoD does not deliver live anthrax to overseas DoD facilities. However, we are still going through records to determine what overseas DoD labs, if any, have received inactivated anthrax samples.

Current as of June 9, 2015